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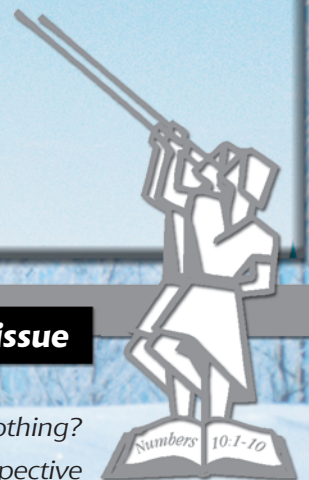
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*Slow
incremental
change will
act like a
leaven
in our
society*



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C. Van Dam

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All or Nothing?

We continue to work for a better solution

A topic that often divides committed Christians concerns one's strategy in trying to be a light and salt in the society in which we live. For example, should we be content with supporting a law that offers less than we would ideally like to see? The matter is not as simple as may first appear. For example, there are not a few committed pro-life people who sincerely hold that no law can be supported unless it outlaws abortion outright, except by way of rare exception to save the physical life of the mother. Would supporting a less than ideal abortion law not mean that you give your approval to the killing that is still being done under that law?

Should we go for all or nothing, or should we work incrementally, one small step at a time for change? Those who go for all or nothing often consider it a matter of conscience, a position which is difficult to argue against. If we are serious about being active in the public square, particularly when it comes to political matters, we need to reflect on this problem.

The nature of politics

Parliament goes as the society that elects its members goes. This means that Christians in Parliament need to work for the good of the country with secularists, humanists, and, given Canada's multicultural reality, with those of non-Christian faiths. A similar cooperation holds for citizens of the nation. We live with others in the same community and work with each other through local and provincial governments to seek the best for our society. At the same time, seeking the best does not always mean that we are thrilled with the results as Christians, whether it be the politics of a local town or city hall or the federal parliament. We realize, as an old adage

has it, that politics is the art of the possible. This truth however implies that compromises must be made.

It is at this point that protests are heard. Compromise? Never! As Christians we cannot compromise biblical truth and biblical norms. Is Christ not king of all creation and his Word must be heeded. The other side says, yes, but if it is not possible to outlaw all evil, can we not agree to outlaw some of it in society? Does the nature of a pluralistic democracy not demand that we give and take and seek to get what we can where we can in terms of advancing a Christian agenda?

So what do we do with the concept of compromise, that is, settling for less than we would ideally prefer? Compromise is basically conceding that we cannot get as much as we would like as Christians at a given point of time. However, such compromise does not mean that we leave it at that, but we continue to work for a better solution with a view to honouring God and his Word. Do we approve or disapprove of such moral concession?

Is compromise biblical?

We live in a fallen world and the Christian ideal is rarely achieved, not just in politics, but in every sphere of life. This reality suggests that compromise is unavoidable, a necessary interim step in the hope of achieving in the long term what is impossible in the short term. But is such compromising consistent with what the Bible teaches?

It is remarkable that the Lord God often showed much patience and understanding for our fallen nature in situations where we might be less tolerant. Here are some examples. In Exodus 12 God had set the date for the Passover, but a mere two years later, God accommodated his people by setting a second



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date for this feast (Num 9). God did not strictly insist that the original date be maintained at all costs, although this was his clearly expressed divine will. Another example: God forbade the eating of an animal that was found dead (Lev 7:24; Deut 14:21). Yet, He reckoned with the weakness of his people and made provision for disobedience to this ordinance (Lev 11:40). A final example: God hates divorce (Mal 2:16), but knowing the hardness of men's hearts, he showed considerable tolerance (Deut 24:1-4; Matt 19:8). In all these examples, God was willing to settle for a situation that was less than He would have liked, for He reckoned with the reality of the power of sin. But, God was working towards the long term goal of the redemption and holiness of his people.

There is, however, more to God's accommodation. God certainly did not condone sin or minimize the seriousness of disobedience. But, by accommodating to the hardness of men's hearts, God moderated the effects of sin. For example: by allowing for divorce, He provided a legal framework to part ways and prevent worse things from happening. By giving a second date for the Passover, He still enabled his people to benefit from this feast. By working this way, God showed his patience and love to his people. He knew that they could not be a new creation overnight and that life is a long pilgrimage in which the progress in holiness and commitment is not without struggle and falling. That reality is still very much with us today as we seek sanctification in all our life.

Now if God was and is willing to factor in the reality of the sin-ridden world in which we live, should we then not also be willing to settle for less than the ideal and likewise reckon with the hard reality of a fallen creation, which we share with our fellow citizens? Is it not sometimes necessary to compromise to prevent worse things from happening? In hindsight, one wonders whether we would not have been better off if more people had been willing to compromise when Parliament dealt with the abortion issue in 1988. How many lives could have been spared if we had at least some type of restriction

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on the practice? Now Canada has the dubious distinction of being the only country among developed nations that has absolutely no limitation on abortion. It has been rightly said that if we strive for the very best, we may end up losing even second best. It is therefore better to settle for the second best, not with joy, but with sincere regret and with the realization that the ideal is not yet attainable.

If we strive for the very best, we may end up losing even second best

In this connection, it is good to remember the sober word of Ecclesiastes. "Do not be overrighteous" (7:16a). The context of these words is the helplessness that the Preacher experiences in watching evil apparently triumph over good. The righteous one dies in spite of his doing good, but the wicked man seems to live forever in his evil doing (Eccl 7:16). The Teacher then counsels that the righteous should not think that they can rectify all evil and wrongs. It is beyond their power to do so and trying to achieve this end will destroy them. And therefore, "Be not overrighteous." There is also a great danger in such an attitude. One could not only end up overestimating one's own abilities, but also be critical of God for not doing more to curb evil. One should rather comprehend the power of sin and fear God (cf. Eccl 7:18).

Incrementalism can be blessed

History teaches that a dedicated Christian approach to eradicating evil structures and practices from society by small incremental steps, which involve compromise, can be blessed and has been blessed by the Lord. A famous case is that of William Wilberforce (1759-1833). He was instrumental in outlawing slavery and banishing this evil from the British Empire. But it did not come overnight. It took much perseverance and much compromise to reach his goal. Rather than seeking to abolish slavery

outright, he first targeted the abolition of the slave trade and not slavery itself. After eighteen years, such a bill eventually passed in 1806, and the abolition of slavery took another twenty-seven years. However, in the meantime, he supported legislation that seemed to go against his cause. For example, he backed a bill that would regulate the number of slaves allowed on a single ship. He also voted for a bill that required plantation owners to register their slaves. Both bills implicitly continued to legalize slavery, but Wilberforce saw, correctly, that these incremental changes were good for the slaves and so he supported them while continuing his struggle to outlaw slavery altogether.

A more current example is the struggle in Canada to raise the age of consent for sexual activity. On May 1, 2008, the age was finally raised from fourteen to sixteen. This is something to be happy about. But one should realize that the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child, to which Canada is signatory, define a child as being under age eighteen. It would, therefore, have been better to raise the age of consent to eighteen. However, under the circumstances that would not have happened. Less is better than nothing.

In conclusion

We need to exercise patience with our society which is increasingly secular and neo-pagan. Change will not come overnight. As the Lord has exercised great patience and love with a rebellious Israel and often lapsing church – yes, even with us – we must show love and endurance in seeking to influence our culture and the political process in a Christian manner. This has nothing to do with giving up the truth and compromising in the sense of denying the Lord and his place in our life. It means that we should not be overrighteous and think that we can eradicate all evil quickly and on our terms. Rather we should try to move ahead as the Lord gives opportunity, if necessary, one baby step at a time. Slow incremental change will act like a leaven in our society and under God's blessing lead to bigger and better things.



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MATTHEW 13:52

The Last Enemy

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

1 Corinthians 15:26

Every one of our children is born into a war. The labour room of every hospital is a war zone, for enemies surround us! Satan and a godless society are not our friends and are not prepared to do us any favours. It could not get worse!

There is even an enemy within our own ranks: we are frequently our own worst enemies! Every day we battle the desires of our own sinful nature. If it were not for the saving work of Christ and the powerful message of victory in the blood of Jesus, we would easily succumb to disillusionment and frustration. We would put out the white flag of surrender. To our dying day it is our sinful tendency to be turncoats and to side with the enemy.

There is however, one enemy that no one really longs to meet: death. Our culture is somewhat ambivalent about death. On the one hand, death is treated as just another medical procedure. The countless aborted babies and the growing number of sick and elderly who die by euthanasia testify to this. On the other hand, our culture tries to avoid all thought of death, while youth and beauty are idolized. Many people attempt to outrun death through medical treatments, proper nutrition, dieting, and a general care for the body.

Death is the last enemy we face. For all who die without faith in Christ, death offers no hope but endless sorrow and despair. Only when our life is in Christ can we say, “Death has been swallowed up

in victory. . . The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:54, 56-57).

But why do believers need to die if Christ has already gained the victory over death? In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul addresses this issue, confirming and substantiating the glorious gospel of Christ’s victory over death. Jesus rose triumphant and therefore death has lost its sting!

Death is not a natural part of our existence. Death came into the world because of sin and since Christ has conquered sin, He has conquered death also. Christ Himself proclaimed, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

Jesus Christ will destroy every power that rises up against Him. According to God’s counsel and plan, all Christ’s enemies must be brought into subjection to Him. Satan, godless men, sin, and death will all be placed under Christ’s feet. And the last enemy which Christ will destroy is death. The light of the gospel pushes back the darkness of the grave!

But why is death the last enemy to be subdued? Is it because death is the last of the enemies to enter a person’s life? Although this may be true, the real reason lies elsewhere. Think about it: If Christ had destroyed death right after his

resurrection, He wouldn’t have been able to finish his work of redemption. For it was the will of the Lord to have the message of Christ’s victory preached to all nations. Death is the last enemy to be destroyed, to give Christ the opportunity to gather into one all who are chosen to everlasting life.

Notice the mercy of God: He delivers his redeemed and takes them out of this sinful life! The Lord takes his loved ones to Himself, releasing them from the body of sin. They do not have to wait until the return of his Son to be relieved from the suffering, pain, and sin of this present age. And while one person dies and passes through the gates of everlasting life, there are new children born into the covenant.

Those who die in the Lord can be assured that death is the last enemy and that it will be destroyed. On the last day the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised. Death will have no dominion over any of God’s children anymore. No child of the Lord will ever die again!

As we face the struggles and battles of each day, let us be comforted. The day is coming when the last enemy will be destroyed. God will be with his people and He will wipe every tear from our eyes. On that day all God’s children will rejoice together in what has been accomplished for us through Jesus Christ. He will be everything to everybody!





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Evangelism in Historical Perspective (Part 2 of 3)

In the previous article we looked at evangelism from a biblical perspective. In this article we look at the approach to evangelism which we have inherited in the Canadian Reformed tradition. We are looking for answers to questions such as: how important has evangelism been in the history of our churches? What methods and approaches have been used? Has evangelism been viewed as the task of office-bearers or rather the calling of ordinary church members? Has evangelism been a ministry that was discussed at major assemblies or was it left to the initiative of the local churches?

The New Testament reveals to us that both "ordinary believers" and "office-bearers" participated in the ministry of evangelism. In Acts 11 we read that Greek speaking Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene went to the city of Antioch "and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus" (v. 20). Here we have an example of ordinary believers evangelizing others. The Lord blessed their efforts. At the same time we note that Barnabas and Saul soon became involved in the work, teaching the gospel in Antioch for a whole year (v. 26). It is

a beautiful example of ordinary believers and office-bearers working together in the ministry of the spreading of the gospel.

Early Christian church

In the early Christian church the same approach was used. Ordinary believers would use their social networks, live a Christian life among unbelievers, use opportunities to speak about the gospel, and take friends and relatives to church. Once people started coming to church and showed genuine interest, they would enter a program of instruction aimed at bringing them to faith.

The church father Augustine wrote an evangelism course entitled "On the Instruction of Newcomers" (Latin title: *De Catechizandis Rudibus*). From this book and other sources we know that newcomers to the faith went through an initiation process that consisted of three stages. First, they were considered *inquirers*. If their interest was serious they became *catechumens* and received thorough instruction into the Christian faith over a considerable period of time. This instruction was given by office-bearers (elders, deacons, bishops). Finally, if it

became clear that they had come to faith they became *competentes* – which meant that they were ready to be baptized.

Throughout this process newcomers were expected to attend church services. It is interesting to read Augustine's sermons and to note that he often had a word of application or exhortation for the catechumens who were present among the congregation.

One of the lessons we learn from the early Christian church is that the initiation of newcomers was a *congregational ministry*. Both ordinary members and office-bearers were involved in the process. Another lesson we learn is that the early church was not afraid to take newcomers through a program of thorough instruction.

The Reformation

During the Middle Ages the Christian church lost much of its strength. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was, among other things, an attempt to re-evangelize Western Europe. By that time most people in Western Europe were baptized but it did not mean much. Many people were "baptized pagans" – they had been baptized in the Roman Catholic Church but they lived like pagans.

Church News

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From this perspective it is interesting to note that the Church Order of Dordrecht (1618-1619) stipulated that elders were "to comfort and instruct the members of the congregation and *also to exhort others with respect to the Christian Religion*" (emphasis added).¹ Clearly, elders were mandated to function as shepherds of the flock of Christ but they were also expected to exhort people in the broader society to repent and come to faith. Something similar was stated with respect to the mandate of the ministers. The Form for Ordination said (and still says) that the minister "shall teach the Word of God to the youth of the Church *and to others whom God calls.*"

The impression we get from these documents is that the early Reformed church followed the same approach we observed in the early Christian church: church members take friends and relatives to church; office-bearers instruct newcomers in the Christian faith, and elders and ministers are expected to speak to the unchurched as well, appealing to them to be reconciled to God.

Churches of the Secession

The ministry of evangelism has gone through good times and bad times. When the churches were in decline evangelism was also in decline. At other times, when there was reformation, evangelism activity would also be reformed.

A beautiful example of evangelistic zeal emerges from the history of the Reformed churches of the Secession of the nineteenth century. The Secession churches saw an urgent need for the re-evangelization of the Dutch nation. The matter was discussed in local consistories, at classis level, and even at regional and national

synods. Sunday Schools were started, evangelistic pamphlets were distributed, evangelists were appointed, and ministers took an active role in evangelism.

A famous name in this regard is Dr. Lucas Lindeboom. Before he became a professor at the theological seminary in Kampen, he served two congregations. In both cases he was very active in evangelism. On a Saturday afternoon he would be found in the downtown area of the city, handing out Bibles and pamphlets and speaking to the townspeople about the gospel of salvation. Lindeboom also took a leading role in some of the evangelism organizations which were formed in those years.

When the churches were in decline evangelism was also in decline

The picture which emerges from nineteenth century Reformed churches in Holland is similar to what we observed in the early Christian church: evangelism was a priority and it was considered to be a congregational ministry in which both office-bearers and ordinary members participated.

During the twentieth century the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands lost much of their evangelistic zeal. The explanation for that development is complex, but one reason was that the ministry of evangelism became a victim of the theological distinction between church as organism and church as institute. The question was asked: is evangelism the mandate of the ordinary believers (church-as-organism) or is it the mandate of the office-bearers

(church-as-institute)? Some defended the view that the proclamation of the gospel is an "official" duty and that therefore ministers should take responsibility for evangelism. Others defended the view that ministers should work strictly within the church and that ordinary believers should do the evangelizing. It was a discussion without a clear solution because it posed a wrong dilemma.

The "liberated" tradition

In the recent history of the Canadian Reformed Churches Rev. Gijsbertus VanDooren has done much to demolish wrong dilemmas with respect to evangelism. The title of his booklet on evangelism is eloquent: *Get Out! & Get Rid of Dilemmas*.

Rev. VanDooren's view was that evangelism is a congregational ministry and that both office-bearers and church members have a role to play. Building on that principle he suggested that the church members should act as *front soldiers* and the office-bearers as *instructors*. In other words, church members should evangelize outsiders and office-bearers should give instruction on how to do it.

Rev. VanDooren's efforts to promote evangelism among the Canadian Reformed churches must be appreciated. His emphasis on the responsibility of "ordinary believers" in evangelism was needed at the time. I am less enthusiastic, however, about his

use of the term “instructor” to describe the role of the office-bearers. In VanDooren’s view office-bearers are not to be actively involved in evangelistic activity – at least, not “as office-bearers.” A minister might talk to his unbelieving neighbour during his “free time” but then he would do so as a believer, not as a minister. A minister may instruct church members on how to do neighbourhood Bible study groups but he should not conduct such a group himself – after all, he is only an instructor.

I believe that in this approach ministers and elders are too far removed from the practice of evangelism. If we always keep our office-bearers away from the action of evangelism, we should not be surprised that the ordinary members (the “front-soldiers”) lose courage and direction.

It is interesting to note that the Synod of Cloverdale (1984) adopted a revised version of the Church Order in which the mandate of the elders was narrowed down to focus solely on work within the congregation. The phrase in the original version that elders should “exhort others with respect to the Christian faith” was deleted from the mandate of elders. In my opinion this illustrates that the Canadian Reformed churches had become more inward looking than the churches of the Reformation and the Secession.

Evaluation

Time has moved on and we need to ask: has the “instructors and front-soldiers” model worked for the Canadian Reformed churches? I do not believe it has.

I am not even sure that the CanRC have really tried to implement it. I do not really see our ministers giving instructing to church members on good evangelism methods and then the members going out to practice it. In a way this is understandable. How could ministers give instruction on how to evangelize if they do not have experience in doing it themselves?

Both office-bearers and church members have a role to play

The more common approach is that a CanRC consistory appoints an Evangelism Committee (EC). This committee is then mandated to come up with ideas on how to do evangelism. Sometimes even more is expected. I have seen an example of a mandate of a local EC which stipulates that the committee is to “stimulate, equip, and organize the congregation towards evangelism activities.” Note the wording! While VanDooren suggested that office-bearers should do the equipping, now we are expecting the members of the EC to do it. That is a tall order. The congregation generally does not take anything seriously unless office-bearers play a leading role. We are expecting too much from our ECs!

What is the solution? In my view the term “instructor” for the role of the ministers and elders should be dropped. It creates too much distance between the office-bearers and the practice of evangelism. We should also take

another look at the practice of farming out the evangelistic ministry to an Evangelism Committee. The office-bearers should be more actively involved.

Instead of sidelining our ministers and elders as “instructors” we should rather use them as “player-coaches.” The minister should, as it were, put on his skates, get his stick on the ice and take part in the action. In other words, the minister should be visibly active in evangelism – as much as time constraints allow.

It will be healthy for every minister to have some evangelistic contacts outside the congregation. Not only will it prevent him from developing a myopic view of life, it will also give his sermons and prayers an evangelistic flavour which will have a formative effect on the congregation as a whole. The same applies to elders. By definition, they are men who command respect. It would be great if our elders had the reputation that they are not afraid to use the contacts which they have in the broader society to “exhort others to the Christian faith.”

By saying this, I am not suggesting that the responsibility for evangelism should be thrown back entirely into the lap of the office-bearers. Evangelism is a *congregational* ministry, as we have seen. Both office-bearers and ordinary members should be involved in it. I hope to say more on the practice of evangelism in the next article.

¹ English translation quoted from Article 23, Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches (pre-1984 version); Acts of the General Synod of Orangeville 1968, p. 120.



Defending the Faith Today

(Part 4)

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C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (P&R, 2006). 318 pages

Today most of the attacks on Christianity are made in the name of science and most modern apologetic works therefore deal with the relation between faith and science. The interpretation of the book of Genesis often looms large in these works. A central issue here is the conflict between the biblical account of creation and the neo-Darwinist theory of evolution, but historical-critical attacks on the reliability of the Bible play an important role as well. In his book on the first four chapters of Genesis (which is addressed primarily to students of theology) Collins deals with these issues. He has also written a less technical work on the topic, entitled *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Crossway, 2003, 448 pages).

Collins has the academic qualifications to write on the relation between the Genesis account and the opposing scientific and Bible-critical theories. He has studied science and theology, possesses a master's degree in both electrical engineering and divinity and a Ph.D. in Hebrew linguistics, and has devoted much study to the first chapters of Genesis. At present he is professor of Old Testament at Covenant

Theological Seminary in St. Louis, where besides teaching Old Testament subjects he gives a course entitled "Christian Faith in an Age of Science."

A theologian in the Reformed tradition who professes the infallibility of Scripture, Collins concerns himself not only with the secular attacks, but also with the controversies that exist among conservative Christians about the interpretation of Genesis 1 –

Collins gives a wealth of evidence to show that Genesis originated in the time of Moses and that Moses is the primary author of the Pentateuch

specifically about matters such as the age of the earth and the length of the creation days. These controversies and in-house conflicts, he says, cause believers to miss the real focus of the biblical account. They are also unnecessary, since they are to a large extent the result of a misreading of the Hebrew text. He proposes a method that will guide the student, he promises, to a clearer understanding of that text – one that gives attention to differences in genre, to linguistic

and literary details, and to the larger context of a passage. That same method he applies to the matter of the Darwinist challenges and to historical-critical attacks. I begin with the latter category.

Conflicting creation accounts?

Collins uses his methodology to good effect in dealing with what biblical critics call conflicting creation accounts – one in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, another in the rest of Genesis 2. He shows that the latter pericope, which records the creation of Adam and later of Eve and their stationing in the garden, is not a separate creation story but simply an elaboration or "close-up" of Genesis 1:27. He also explains the differences in the name of God in these two sections, with the first pericope speaking of "God" (Elohim) and the following ones (Genesis 2, 3) using the composite name, "the LORD God" (Yahweh Elohim). This is another point used by critics to question the historicity of the creation account and to claim that the author or editor used conflicting sources. Collins rejects that theory, showing that the change in the divine name is intentional and altogether relevant. In the first pericope, he points out, God presents Himself "in his majesty, power, transcendence, and ownership with respect to the creation,"

whereas in Genesis 2 and 3 he reveals himself as the God who establishes a relationship with his creatures – indeed, as the God of the covenant. The use of the two names “makes it clear that the God who has yoked himself by promises to the patriarchs and their offspring (and hence to the first audience) is the transcendent Creator of heaven and earth.”

Authorship and sources

Also of interest are Collins’ conclusions about the sources and authorship of Genesis. Having discussed some versions of the documentary hypothesis, he gives a wealth of evidence to show that Genesis originated in the time of Moses (rather than in the period of the kings or even later, as modern scholars often suggest) and that Moses is the primary author of Genesis, and indeed of the entire Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible. He further devotes a chapter to the communicative purposes of Genesis 1-4, drawing attention, among other things, to the possible relation between ancient-near-eastern stories of origins and the account of Genesis. He agrees with Gerhard Hasel’s well-known thesis that the Genesis account is in part a polemic against (or at least an alternative to and correction of) the Babylonian creation story. (For that interpretation see my series “Genesis 1 in Context,” *Clarion*, August 1, 15, and 29, 2003.)

World picture and worldview

Much has been written about the fact that the world picture of Genesis, and of the Old Testament as a whole, appears “primitive” compared to the one we get from modern science. We read, for example, of a moving sun and a

non-moving earth, of the moon as a lamp instead of a reflector of light, of the sky as a “firmament,” and so on. According to critics this again poses a serious challenge to the Bible’s truth claims. Collins’ answer is twofold. Firstly, he reminds us that the Bible describes things not “scientifically” but as they appear to our eyes. In other words, it uses phenomenological language. We do the same.

Our following of God in his work and rest anticipates one of the ways in which the Bible views the process of human moral formation: as imitating God

Even modern scientists will talk of a rising and setting sun, although they don’t believe for a moment that the sun moves around the earth. Another example of *phenomenological* description is the Hebrew word in Genesis 1:6-8 that is often translated as “firmament.” That word suggests that the sky is a hard canopy or vault, which is indeed what it can look like. Perhaps the first readers held that view, but that does not prove anything against the Bible’s truth value. The ancient world picture, including the ancient idea of physical cosmology, is not necessarily a part of the *message* being communicated.

Collins tells us – and this is the second part of his answer – to distinguish between world picture and worldview. The term world picture refers to a community’s

shared experiences and to what people imagine the physical shape of the earth and the universe to be. A worldview, on the other hand, deals with questions of ultimate concern, such as those about the origin of the world, the existence of God, the nature and destiny of man. A world picture must be taken into account in order to communicate but is culture-bound and therefore temporary; a worldview does not have to be. It is quite possible, Collins remarks, that biblical statements reflect a *world picture* that is foreign to us – for example with respect to the shape and position of the earth or the nature of the moon or the sky – while at the same time communicating a *worldview* to which we still subscribe.

Length of the days and age of the earth

This issue divides not only secularists and Christians but is also a source of disagreement among believers themselves. Collins’ main concern, as suggested, is to bridge the latter divide. I found this part of his work somewhat disappointing. An advocate of an “older” earth, he does not come with insights that are really new, and it is doubtful that he will convince people on either extreme of the controversy – that is, young-earth creationists on the one hand and theistic evolutionists on the other. That by itself does not of course disqualify his interpretation. Although he by no means answers every question, I can agree with much of what he says. But the expectation that his new methodology would open surprisingly new vistas in this particular area remains unfulfilled.

Collins positions himself as an adherent of the “analogical days

approach," which, as he points out, was already held by earlier Reformed scholars, including the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck. According to this position the days are to be seen not as calendar days but as "God's workdays," whose length is not specified but which were probably much longer than the normal twenty-four hour day. As arguments against the "normal day" interpretation the author mentions, among other things, the "crowded" nature of the sixth day (as described in both Genesis 1 and 2) and the fact that the seventh day lacks the refrain that ends each of the previous ones ("and there was evening and there was morning, the nth day"). If the seventh day is not an ordinary day, he concludes, we may assume the same for the previous six.

He also comments on the genre of Genesis 1, which he describes as an "exalted prose narrative" rather than a scientific account. Referring to the refrain concluding each of the six days, he observes that God is presented here as a workman who goes through his workweek, takes his daily rest (the night between the evening and the morning), and enjoys his Sabbath rest. "To speak this way is to speak analogically about God's activity; that is, we understand what he did by analogy with what we do; and in turn, that analogy provides guidance for man in the proper way to carry on his own work and rest." Our following of God in his work and rest "anticipates one of the ways in which the Bible views the process of human moral formation: as imitating God." As so often in Scripture, God is described here *anthropomorphically* (that is, human characteristics are ascribed

to him). Also elsewhere in the creation account God is presented in anthropomorphic language – namely in the verses that describe him as a potter or sculptor, forming man out of the dust of the earth, and in the statement that He "rested."

Other comments

Collins offers comments on various other aspects of the Genesis account. They include notes on the appearance of the heavenly lights on the fourth day, on man's being made in the image of God, on the meaning of the two trees in Genesis 2, on the way in which the woman's "desire" will be for (or against?) her husband, on the question whether animals were carnivorous (flesh-eating) before the fall (Collins thinks so, giving

The Old Testament "world picture" is not necessarily a part of the message being communicated

what I believe to be convincing reasons), and on the related question whether there was animal death before the fall. He also comments on the meaning of the phrase "according to their kinds" in the creation account, questions the idea that the word "kind" is the equivalent of the more technical term "species," and rejects the suggestion that the text, as young-earth creationism tends to assume, necessarily opposes the notion of new species developing from old ones.

Conclusion

Collins' book is well-written and not overly difficult, even for the non-theologian (although the other book I mentioned is indeed more accessible). Collins' chief contribution to the topic under discussion in the present series is his attempt to base his conclusions on biblical exegesis. True, he does pay attention to the claims of modern science, but that is not in itself objectionable. New scientific data can and do affect orthodox biblical interpretation – think, for example, of the case of Galileo (who came with scientific arguments to show that the earth moves around the sun, a theory that at first raised objections among many Christians but that we now accept). The danger to be guarded against, and which Collins does keep in mind, is to allow science to *dictate* biblical interpretation.

All this is not to claim that the book gives us the last word on every issue, or that it will satisfy every reader. I already questioned the novelty of the analogical view the author promotes and its universal acceptability among Christians. Objections can no doubt be raised against other aspects of his exegesis. Questions may also be asked about his advocacy of Intelligent Design, tentative though that advocacy remains. But then, to refer once again to Herman Bavinck's words of close to a century ago, the problems arising from modern science are such that not even a generation or an age may be able to resolve them. Collins' book has brought us a few steps further in a number of areas and for that reason deserves our attention.



The ERQ at Twenty

On the first of November, members of the Église Réformée du Québec (Reformed Church of Québec, ERQ) met in Québec City to celebrate their twentieth anniversary. Twenty years may not seem very long. However, we desired to remember and revive the vision of several local, French-speaking Reformed missions who twenty years ago formed a single Reformed church to serve the province of Québec.

The twentieth anniversary of the ERQ provided an opportunity to thank the Lord for his faithfulness in building his church, as well as to encourage us in our endeavours to make disciples of all peoples. Twenty years also provided a moment of more sober reflection. The ERQ began with nine local congregations and mission posts. We now number five in total. However, the Reformed confessional witness continues in the province of Quebec.

The main events of the one day celebration included morning fellowship time, a challenging address by Pastor Paulin Bédard based on Psalm 78 reminding us to pray even for our grandchildren, and a testimony by Pastor Mario Veilleux of his conversion to the saving grace of God. We were delighted to hear from our special guest speaker, Pastor Harold Kallemeyn, who had formerly worked in Quebec and is now active in missions to French-speaking Africa. Mr. Kallemeyn called us to be welcoming of



visitors, particularly the nations immigrating to Quebec, to learn from them and to go to the nations of the world with our God-given gifts and resources.

The afternoon activities included a round table discussion. Members from each of the five congregations shared how and why they had joined the ERQ, as well as their vision and projects for the future. Free time was spent perusing photos of the past twenty years. Boy, how people change!

Fraternal greetings were also received. Pastor Jack Peterson, representing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, encouraged the ERQ to do the impossible: conquer Quebec for Christ. Letters of encouragement were also received from the Heritage Reformed congregations, the Canadian Reformed churches and the United Reformed congregations.

The day concluded with a thanksgiving worship service attended by 150 members and friends. Pastor J.G. Zoellner

brought the Word from Zachariah 2, reminding us that the Lord is now building his church without walls.

A special word of thanks was expressed to Pastor Zoellner, as well as Pastor Jean-Guy Deblois and elders Benoit Jacques and Luc Thibaudeau. These four brothers have faithfully served the Reformed churches in Quebec the past twenty-five years. We concluded by singing a song asking the Lord to raise up more workers for his harvest in Quebec.

Celebration includes food. The evening banquet provided a beautiful opportunity to meet with brothers and sisters in Christ, renew ties, and develop new friendships. Gauging by the smiling faces and the words of appreciation, every one left a little bit happier than when they came.

Please remember the ERQ in your prayers as we continue the work of the Lord in the province of Quebec the next twenty years and beyond.



roadside assistance

the magazine for Reformed young people

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word. Ps 119:9

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Every Thought

Laura Kieft

In Psalm 139:1-2, David says, "Oh Lord. . . You perceive my thoughts from afar." Out of all the ideas in the Bible, this could be one of the scariest ones. God reads our thoughts like we check someone's Facebook profile: quickly, at a glance. And He does not have to log in or wait for them to upload; He knows them "from afar."

With all the garbage and gunk that has the potential to occupy our thoughts, the idea that God can read our thoughts, our "mindspace," so quickly and wholly is a challenge. What is on our "mindspace"? And what should *actually* be there?

The first question is pretty easy to answer: everything. Everything we see, from movies to the car driving down the street. Everything we hear, from music to conversations. Everything we say, which stems from the reactions we had beforehand. Everything has a thought in our "mindspace":

ideas, worries, dreams, plans – they're all up there for God to "see from afar." That's pretty intense and incomprehensible.

So what should *actually* be in our thoughts? In 1 Corinthians 14:14-15, Paul says that it is important for our minds to be involved when we worship. This idea that the Corinthians focus their thoughts on worship also extends to everyday life. In Philippians 4:8, Paul writes a pretty clear and specific list: we should be thinking about whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy. In short, we must use our thoughts and minds to worship God and glorify Him.

God has chosen to reveal Himself to us through our minds and understanding when we read the Bible and listen to a sermon or discussion. This means that we think about is incredibly important (2 Tim 2:7). If we want to have hearts that are fully devoted

to God, we have to change our thoughts as well. In order to be transformed into Christ's image, Paul says we must renew our minds, our thoughts (Rom 12:2).

It is tough. Every day our thoughts stumble, slip off in the wrong direction. Only through supersaturating our minds with God's Word and constantly directing our attention toward Him in prayer can we hope to subject our thoughts to God. By allowing God to occupy this permanent place in our minds, He steps between us and our wayward thoughts and lends his strength to our weak willpower.

Paul says that the true Christian takes every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:5). It's a chasing-down-dark-alleys, wrestling-to-the-ground, and snapping-on-the-handcuffs kind of captivity. But the more we chase our thoughts down, the easier it will be the next time, and the next time. . . .





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms

"Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."

Psalm 124:8

Every Sunday we begin our worship services saying these words. This awakens in us a reverence and a trust in the Lord before we worship Him. This is also a great comfort to us as we make our way into a new year, the year of our Lord 2009. Whatever we face, whether joy or sorrow, whether blessing or trial, we know that our God, creator of heaven and earth, is our help. Amazing!

Isaiah also comforts the people of Israel with these words of the Lord: "But now, this is what the Lord says, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." Baptism is a beautiful display of God's claiming work in our lives. At our baptism, God said to us "you are mine, you belong to me." The knowledge that we belong to the Lord, that we are his children, gives us direction and purpose in our lives from day to day. Our daily lives vary from person to person and day to day. However we spend our time, whether we are at work in the community or whether we are doing our chores at home, our most important task is to glorify God.

Let us all encourage each other in living lives of thankfulness to our heavenly Father. We can go about our daily work cheerfully, knowing that He is at our side in all we do. His helping hands are so very near us. Praise Him! For his love endures forever. He is our help and stay! "Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth." Our prayer is that this confession will be on our hearts and minds throughout this new year. Have a truly blessed new year!

Blest be the God of Israel
Whose deeds in majesty excel;
From age to age praise Him forever.
Let all the people "Amen!" say,
Extol His Name, who fails us never.
Praise Him, the LORD our God for aye!

Psalm 106:24

We have a few birthdays to celebrate in February, congratulations to you all. We wish you the Lord's blessing on your special day. We hope that you enjoy your day with family and friends. We pray that the Lord will give you all that you need to live in thankfulness to Him.

Birthdays in February

12 CONNY VANAMERONGEN will be 44
361 Thirty Road
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
cvanam@sympatico.ca

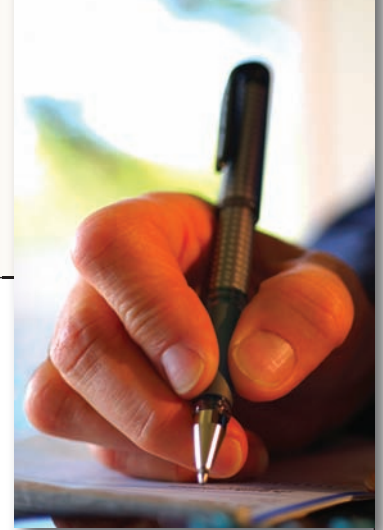
18 CORA SCHOONHOVEN will be 58
93 Oxford Street
Richmond Hill, ON L4C 4L6

24 FRED LUDWIG will be 57
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

Till next month,

Corinne Gelms and Patricia Gelms
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
Phone: 905-563-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca





Dear Editor,

Allow me some comment on Rev. J. van Popta's letter to the editor in issue No. 22 of Oct 24 with regard to the function of CO Article # 55 in our federation.

It is a very good thing that church members still hold their consistories accountable to the plain reading of the Church Order. Likewise some consistories to sister churches in the federation. We know what happens in denominations where the church order is no longer followed literally, being considered outdated or outmoded; the marks of the church become lost too.

I can agree with Rev. van Popta that at times we are inclined to take an article too literally, hammering on each letter and ignoring the spirit of it where it may suit our view. But let's continue to allow members and churches some latitude in their interpretation and application when this does no harm. This is in line with the *Book of Praise* Committee's report to General Synod Smithers where they recommended that it may be left in the freedom of the churches to make use of the revised psalms in different ways. In its response Synod did not suggest that this testing should be done in worship services only, thereby maintaining the freedom there has always been.

That is why I find it troubling that Rev. van Popta "would urge all members of the churches to approach their consistories and request that the revised psalms be used whenever possible in our worship services." One could view this request as interfering in another's business; is this prudent? Many consistories, perhaps with much or possibly with little support from their congregation, have already decided to sing the revised psalms before the worship services. That means that Rev. van Popta is calling for no less than a reversal of a legitimate decision which may cause tensions in this matter. If it works in Fellowship Church and elsewhere, great, but others may have a practice that helps to keep harmony locally and yet

involves the members in the testing, and so help to give the *Book of Praise* Committee the requested feedback.

That being said, I'm in agreement that new or revised songs have been and can continue to be sung within the worship services. As Rev. van Popta notes, revised psalms and hymns have been sung in worship services since the early decades of our federation. It was interesting to learn from a review of the early Acts that none of the contents of the various coloured booklets appear to have been officially adopted, even provisionally, before they were presented to the churches for use. In the development of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter we were eager to obtain our own material. After all, it was the churches, through their appeal to the national synods that resulted in the ongoing mandates to the committees for a completed *Book of Praise*. Faithful and qualified members of our churches worked long at that task; we trusted them and in the main appreciated their work. Likewise we should be thankful to those engaged in improving our *Book of Praise* today and just as eager to use and evaluate their work as was the previous generation.

As for Rev. van Popta's wish to eliminate some terms from our vocabulary, that's not so simple. We have respect for the Church Order. Within its bounds we have rights as individual churches which contributed to the practice of pre or post worship service singing, not for revised psalms or new hymns only. There are congregations where *Glory to God (Ere zij God)* is still sung at New Years and our national anthem *O Canada* is sung on July 1 when it happens to fall on a Sunday, just to name a few examples.

Some songs are not part of our approved collection, yet we may wish to have a place for them.

Ben Meerstra, Vernon, BC

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

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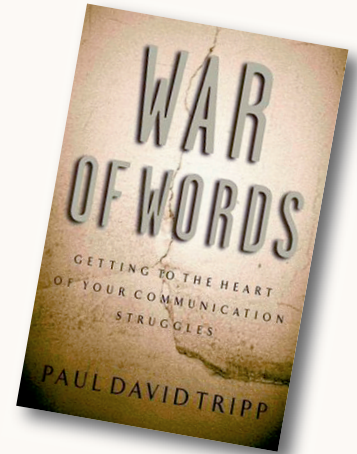
**War of Words: Getting to the
Heart of Your Communication
Struggles,
Paul David Tripp
(Phillipsburg: P & R, 2000)**

**Additional Information:
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Communication is something we all do. At some point or another, we all struggle with communication. This is surely the reason why the book of Proverbs is so filled with wise teaching on the subject. Our Father knows that we are not born as wise and effective communicators. These insights undergird this volume by Paul David Tripp, a counselor at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation and a lecturer at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

There are two main things that lead me to commend this book highly. The first is Tripp's insistence that the problem with our communication is not our words, but our hearts. Communication struggles are heart issues. When we communicate poorly, it is because our hearts are inclined to sin.

Conversely, if we are to grow in communicating better, we need our hearts changed. Says Tripp, "What makes this book different from other communication books is not the author's vast storehouse of wisdom and experience. It is one thing: the gospel. It radically changes the way we understand and wage the war of words that is so much a part of human struggle" (p.44). Tripp lays out how the gospel changes everything and transforms our communication so that it becomes redemptive for the




people around us. His sections on repentance, confrontation, the promises of the gospel, and forgiveness are worth reading over and over again.

It's my observation that a lot of problems in the church would be either resolved quickly or avoided altogether if believers would learn to relate with one another in better ways. This book provides a biblical, Christ-centred guide to that end. If you're eager to grow in this crucial area, this book will definitely be of assistance.



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